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GOOD FRIDAY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

GOOD FRIDAY

A PLAY IN VERSE

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

60999

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

60991

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN. 1917.

PERSONS

PONTIUS PILATE	(*Procurator of Judæa*)
PROCULA	(*His Wife*)
LONGINUS	(*A Centurion*)
A JEW	(*Leader of the Rabble*)
A MADMAN	
A SENTRY	
JOSEPH OF RAMAH	
HEROD	

SOLDIERS, SERVANTS, THE JEWISH RABBLE, LOITERERS, IDLERS

THE SCENE

The Pavement, or Paved Court, outside the Roman Citadel in Jerusalem.

At the back is the barrack wall, pierced in the centre with a double bronze door, weathered to a green colour.

On the right and left sides of the stage are battlemented parapets overlooking the city.

The stage or pavement is approached by stone steps from the front, and by narrow stone staircases in the wings, one on each side, well forward. These steps are to suggest that the citadel is high up above the town, and that the main barrack gate is below. THE CHIEF CITIZEN, THE RABBLE, JOSEPH, THE MADMAN, HEROD, *and* THE LOITERERS, *etc., enter by these steps.*

PILATE, PROCULA, LONGINUS, THE SOLDIERS *and* SERVANTS *enter by the bronze door.*

GOOD FRIDAY

PILATE.

Longinus.

LONGINUS.

Lord.

PILATE.

[*Giving scroll.*] Your warrant. Take the key.
Go to Barabbas' cell and set him free,
The mob has chosen him.

LONGINUS.

And Jesus?

PILATE.

Wait.
He can be scourged and put outside the gate,
With warning not to make more trouble here.
See that the sergeant be not too severe.
I want to spare him.

LONGINUS.

And the Jew, the Priest,
Outside?

PILATE.

I'll see him now.

LONGINUS.

Passover Feast
Always brings trouble, Lord. All shall be done.
Dismiss?

PILATE.

Dismiss.

[*Exit* LONGINUS.]

There's blood about the sun,
This earthquake weather presses on the brain.

[*Enter* PROCULA.]

Yes?

PROCULA.

Dear, forgive me, if I come again
About this Jesus, but I long to know
What Herod said. Did he dismiss him?

PILATE.

No.
He sent him back to me for me to try,
The charge being local.

PROCULA.

Have you tried him?

PILATE.

Ay.

Henceforth he will be kept outside the walls.
Now, listen, wife: whatever dream befalls,
Never again send word to me in Court
To interrupt a case. The Jews made sport
Of what you dreamed and what you bade me fear
About this Jesus man. The laws are clear.
I must apply them, asking nothing more
Than the proved truth. Now tell me of your dream:
What was it? Tell me then.

PROCULA.

I saw a gleam
Reddening the world out of a blackened sky,
Then in the horror came a hurt thing's cry
Protesting to the death what no one heard.

PILATE.

What did it say?

GOOD FRIDAY

PROCULA.

A cry, no spoken word
But crying, and a horror, and a sense
Of one poor man's naked intelligence,
Pitted against the world and being crushed.
Then, waking, there was noise ; a rabble rushed
Following this Jesus here, crying for blood,
Like beasts half-reptile in a jungle mud.
And all the horror threatening in the dim,
In what I dreamed of, seemed to threaten him. . . .
So in my terror I sent word to you,
Begging you dearly to have nought to do
With that wise man.

PILATE.

I grant he says wise things.
Too wise by half, and too much wisdom brings
Trouble, I find. It disagrees with men.
We must protect him from his wisdom then.

PROCULA.

What have you done to him ?

PILATE.

Made it more hard
For him to wrangle in the Temple yard
Henceforth, I hope.

[*Enter* LONGINUS.]

PROCULA.

You have not punished him?

PILATE.

Warned him.

LONGINUS.

The envoy from the Sanhedrim
Is here, my lord.

PILATE.

Go. I must see him. Stay.
You and your women, keep within to-day.
It is the Jewish Feast and blood runs high
Against us Romans when the zealots cry
Songs of their old Deliverance through the land.
Stay, yet. Lord Herod says that he has planned
To visit us to-night, have all prepared.

PROCULA.

I would have gone to Herod had I dared,
To plead for this man Jesus. All shall be
Made ready. Dear, my dream oppresses me.

[*Exit.*]

PILATE.

It is this earthquake weather: it will end
After a shock. Farewell.

[*Enter* CHIEF CITIZEN.]

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Hail, Lord and friend,
I come about a man in bonds with you,
One Jesus, leader of a perverse crew
That haunts the Temple.

PILATE.

Yes, the man is here.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Charged with sedition?

PILATE.

It did not appear
That he had been seditious. It was proved

That he had mocked at rites which people loved.
No more than that. I have just dealt with him.
You wish to see him?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

No, the Sanhedrim
Send me to tell you of his proved intent.
You know how, not long since, a prophet went
Through all Judæa turning people's brains
With talk of One coming to loose their chains?

PILATE.

John the Baptiser, whom old Herod killed.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

The Jews expect that word to be fulfilled,
They think that One will come. This Jesus claims
To be that Man, Son of the Name of Names,
The Anointed King who will arise and seize
Israel from Rome and you. Such claims as these
Might be held mad in other times than ours.

PILATE.

He is not mad.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

But when rebellion lowers
As now, from every hamlet, every farm,
One word so uttered does unreckoned harm.

PILATE.

How do you know this?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

From a man, his friend,
Frightened by thought of where such claims would end.
There had been rumours, yet we only heard
The fact but now. We send you instant word.

PILATE.

Yes. This is serious news. Would I had known.
But none the less, this Jesus is alone.
A common country preacher, as men say,
No more than that, he leads no big array;
No one believes his claim?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

At present, no.
He had more friends a little while ago,
Before he made these claims of being King.

PILATE.

You know about him, then?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

His ministering
Was known to us, of course.

PILATE.

And disapproved?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Not wholly, no; some, truly; some we loved.
At first he only preached. He preaches well.

PILATE.

What of?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Of men, and of escape from hell
By good deeds done. But when he learned his power
And flatterers came, then, in an evil hour,
As far as I can judge, his head was turned.
A few days past, from all that we have learned,
He made this claim, and since persists therein.
Deluders are best checked when they begin.

So, when we heard it from this frightened friend,
We took this course to bring it to an end.

PILATE.

Rightly. I thank you. Do I understand
That friends have fallen from him since he planned
To be this King?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

They have, the most part.

PILATE.

Why?
What makes them turn?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

The claim is blasphemy
Punished by death under the Jewish laws.

PILATE.

And under ours, if sufficient cause
Appear, and yet, if all the Jews despise
This claimant's folly, would it not be wise
To pay no heed, not make important one
Whom all contemn?

CHIEF CITIZEN

His evil is not done.
His claim persists, the rabble's mind will turn.
Better prevent him, Lord, by being stern.
The man has power.

PILATE.

That is true, he has.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

His is the first claim, since the Baptist was.
Better not let it thrive.

PILATE.

It does not thrive.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

All ill weeds prosper, Lord, if left alive.
The soil is ripe for such a weed as this.
The Jews await a message such as his,
The Anointed Man, of whom our Holy Books
Prophesy much. The Jewish people looks
For Him to come.

PILATE.

These ancient prophecies
Are drugs to keep crude souls from being wise.
Time and again Rome proves herself your friend,
Then some mad writing brings it to an end.
Time and again, until my heart is sick,
Dead prophets spreading madness in the quick.
And now this Jesus whom I hoped to save.
Have you the depositions?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Yes, I have.

PILATE.

Give me.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

This is the docquet.

PILATE.

This is grave.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

I thought that you would think so.

PILATE.

I will learn
What he can say to this and then return.

Wait, I must speak. Although I shall not spare
Anyone, man or woman, who may dare
To make a claim that threatens Roman rule,
I do not plan to be a priestly tool.
I know your Temple plots; pretend not here
That you, the priest, hold me, the Roman, dear.
You, like the other Jews, await this King
Who is to set you free, who is to ding
Rome down to death, as your priests' brains suppose.
This case of Jesus shows it, plainly shows.
He and his claim were not at once disowned;
You waited, while you thought "He shall be throned,
We will support him, if he wins the crowd."
You would have, too. He would have been endowed
With all your power to support his claim
Had he but pleased the rabble as at first.
But, since he will not back the priestly aim,
Nor stoop to lure the multitude, you thirst
To win my favour by denouncing him.
This rebel does not suit the Sanhedrim.
I know. . . . The next one may.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

You wrong us, Sire,

PILATE.

Unless he blench, you 'complish your desire
With Jesus, though; there is no king save Rome
Here, while I hold the reins. Wait till I come.

[*Exit* PILATE.]

THE MADMAN.

Only a penny, a penny,
Lilies brighter than any.
White lilies picked for the Feast.

[*He enters, tapping with his stick.*]

I am a poor old man who cannot see,
Will the great noble present tell to me
If this is the Paved Court?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

It is.

MADMAN.

Where men

Beg for a prisoner's freedom?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Yes. What then?

MADMAN.

I come to help the choosing.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

You can go.

MADMAN.

Where, lord?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Why, home. You hear that noise below,
Or are you deaf?

MADMAN

No, lordship, only blind.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Come this-day-next-year if you have the mind.
This year you come too late, go home again.

MADMAN.

Lord, is the prisoner loosed?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Yes, in the lane.
Can you not hear them cry "Barabbas" there?

MADMAN.

Barabbas, lord?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

The prisoner whom they bear
In triumph home.

MADMAN.

Barabbas?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Even he.

MADMAN.

Are not you wrong, my lord?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Why should I be?

MADMAN.

There was another man in bonds, most kind
To me, of old, who suffer, being blind.
Surely they called for him? One Jesus? No?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

The choice was made a little while ago.
Barabbas is set free, the man you name
Is not to be released.

MADMAN.

And yet I came
Hoping to see him loosed.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

He waits within
Till the just pain is fitted to his sin.
It will go hard with him, or I mistake.
Pray God it may.

MADMAN.

I sorrow for his sake.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

God's scathe.

[*Enter more* JEWS.]

MADMAN.

A penny for the love of Heaven.
A given penny is a sin forgiven.
Only a penny, friends.

1ST CITIZEN.

The case was proved. He uttered blasphemy.
Yet Pilate gives him stripes: the man should die.

3RD CITIZEN.

Wait here awhile. It is not over yet.
This is the door, the man shall pay his debt.
After the beating they will let him go
And we shall catch him.

2ND CITIZEN.

We will treat him so
That he will not be eager to blaspheme
So glibly, soon.

3RD CITIZEN.

We will.

1ST CITIZEN.

Did Pilate seem
To you, to try to spare him?

2ND CITIZEN.

Ay, he did,
The Roman dog.

3RD CITIZEN.

We will not.

2ND CITIZEN.

God forbid.

1ST CITIZEN.

Well, we'll stay here.

2ND CITIZEN.

We will anoint this King.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

You talk of Jesus?

1ST CITIZEN.

Yes.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

I had to bring
News from the Temple but a minute past,
To-day is like to be King Jesus' last.

1ST CITIZEN.

So?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

It is sure. Wait here a little while.

1ST CITIZEN.

We mean to, lord. His tongue shall not defile
Our Lord again, by God.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

By happy chance
There came a hang-dog man with looks askance,
Troubled in mind, who wished to speak with us.
He said that he had heard the man speak thus
That he was the Messiah, God in man.
He had believed this, but his doubts began
When Jesus, not content, claimed further things;
To be a yoke upon the necks of Kings.
Emperor and Priest. Then, though he found him kind
In friendship, he was troubled. With bowed mind
He came to us and swore what Jesus claimed.
This Emperor over Kings will now be tamed.

VOICES.

Will Pilate back the priests?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

He cannot fail.

It threatens Roman power.

A VOICE.

Listen, friends,

Pilate is coming ; hark ! the sitting ends.

No. 'Tis the Bench.

[*The Bench is set by* SLAVES.]

What will Lord Pilate do ?

[THE SLAVES *do not answer.*]

You Nubian eunuchs answer to the Jew.

Is the man cast ?

A SLAVE.

The circumcised will see

When Rome is ready.

[*Goes in and shuts the door.*]

A VOICE.

There. They nail a tree.

They make a cross, for those are spikes being driven.

He's damned.

A Voice.

Not so, he still may be forgiven.
The cross may be for one of those two thieves.

A Voice.

I had forgotten them.

A Voice.

This man believes
That Pilate was inclined to let him go.

2nd Citizen.

That was before this charge came.

A Voice.

Even so
This Roman swine is fond of swine like these.

A Voice.

Come, Pilate, come.

A Voice.

He will not have much ease
This Paschal Feast, if Jesus is not cast.

A Voice.

There is the door. Lord Pilate comes at last.
No. 'Tis the trumpet.

[A Trumpeter *comes out.*]

Voices.

Blow the trumpet, friend.

A Voice.

Roman. Recruit. When will the sitting end.

Voices.

Fling something at him: Roman.

A Voice.

O, have done.
He will not hang until the midday sun
And we shall lose our sleeps. Let sentence pass.

A Voice.

[*Singing.*] As I came by the market I heard a woman sing:
"My love did truly promise to wed me with a ring,
But, oh, my love deceived me and left me here forlorn
With my spirit full of sorrow, and my baby to be born."

A Voice.

Why are you standing here?

A Voice.

I came to see.

A Voice.

O, did you so?

A Voice.

Why do you look at me?

A Voice.

You were his friend: You come from Galilee.

A Voice.

I do not.

A Voice.

Yes, you do.

A Voice.

I tell you, No.

A Voice.

You know this man quite well.

A Voice.

I do not know
One thing about him.

A Voice.

Does he know the cur?

A Voice.

Ay, but denies. He was his follower.

A Voice.

I was not.

A Voice.

Why, I saw you in the hall,
I watched you.

A Voice.

I was never there at all

A Voice.

So you would be a King.

A Voice.

That was the plan.

A Voice.

I swear to God I never saw the man.

A Voice.

He did; you liar; fling him down the stair.

A Voice.

I did not, friends. I hate the man, I swear.

Voices.

You swear too much for truth, down with him, sons.
Leave him, here's Pilate.

[*Enter* Longinus *and* Soldiers.]

Longinus.

Stand back. Keep further back. Get down the stair,
Stop all this wrangling. Make less babble there.
Keep back yet further. See you keep that line.
Silence. These Jewish pigs.

The Jews.

The Roman swine.

[*Enter* Pilate.]

Pilate.

Longinus.

LONGINUS.

Lord.

PILATE.

No Jew here thinks him King.
They want his blood.

LONGINUS.

They would want anything
That would beguile the hours until the Feast.

PILATE.

I would be glad to disappoint the priest.
I like this Jesus man. A man so wise
Ought not to end through crazy prophecies.
Still, he persists.

LONGINUS.

They are a stubborn breed.
The medicine Cross is what they mostly need.

PILATE.

Still, this man is, in fact, a kind of king,
A God beside these beasts who spit and sting,
The best Jew I have known.

LONGINUS.

He had his chance.

PILATE.

O, yes, he had. We'll let the Jews advance
Into the court. I tried to set him free.
Still, if he will persist, the thing must be.
And yet I am sorry.

LONGINUS.

I am sorry, too.
He seemed a good brave fellow, for a Jew.
Still, when a man is mad there is no cure
But death, like this.

PILATE.

I fear so.

LONGINUS.

I am sure.
Shall I begin?

PILATE.

Yes.

LONGINUS.

Sound the Assembly. [*Trumpet.*] Sound
The Imperial call. [*Trumpet.*]

PILATE.

You people, gathered round,
Behold your King.

VOICES.

Our King. I see him. Where?
That heap of clothes behind the soldiers there.
He has been soundly beaten. Look, he bleeds.
A cross on Old Skull Hill is what he needs.

PILATE.

What would you, then, that I should do to him?

VOICES.

Stone the blasphemer, tear him limb from limb,
Kill him with stones, he uttered blasphemy,
Give him to us, for us to crucify.
Crucify!

PILATE.

Would you crucify your King?

VOICES.

He is no King of ours ; we have no King
But Cæsar. Crucify !

PILATE.

Bring pen and ink.

LONGINUS.

Hold up the prisoner, Lucius ; give him drink.

PILATE.

I come to sentence.

SERVANT.

Writing things, my lord.

PILATE.

Fasten the parchment to the piece of board.
So. I will write.

VOICES.

What does his writing mean ?
It is the sentence of this Nazarene,
Condemning him to death. A little while
And he'll be ours. See Lord Pilate smile.
Why does he smile ?

PILATE.

Longinus.

LONGINUS.

Lord.

PILATE.

Come here.

Go to that man, that upland targeteer,
I want this writ in Hebrew. Bid him write
Big easy letters that will catch the sight.

LONGINUS.

I will, my lord. Make way.

[*Exit* LONGINUS.]

A VOICE.

What's on the scroll?

A VOICE.

It gives the prisoner into his control
To nail to death, the foul blaspheming beast.

A VOICE.

D'you think he will be dead before the Feast?

A Voice.

They'll spear him if he lingers until dark.

A Voice.

When Feast begins he will be stiff and stark.
There's little life left in him as it is.

Voices.

We'll hammer iron through those hands of his,
And through his feet, and when the cross is set
Jolt it; remember. I will not forget.

A Voice.

Here comes the sentence.

[*Enter* Longinus.]

A Voice.

Wait; it is not signed.

A Voice.

Come to the hill, you will be left behind.
I want a good place at the cross's foot.

A Voice.

I've got a stone for when they move the brute.
Besides, I mean to bait him on the way.
I'll spatter him with filth.

A Voice.

No, come away.

Pilate.

Imperial finding in the High Priest's suit.
In the name of Cæsar and of Rome. . . .

Longinus.

Salute.

Pilate.

I, Procurator of Judæa, say
That Jesus, called the King, be led away
To death by crucifixion, here and now.
In the name of Cæsar and of Rome. . . .

Longinus.

We bow
To the sentence of the court.

Pilate.

See sentence done.
This is your warrant.

Longinus.

Sentence shall be done.

GOOD FRIDAY

VOICES.

Away, friends, hurry. Keep a place for me.
Get there before they come, then we shall see
All of the nailing and the fixing on.

PILATE.

Longinus.

LONGINUS.

Lord.

PILATE.

Display this scroll upon
The head of Jesus' cross, that men may read.
Wait; I'll declare it publicly. Take heed. . . .
I add this word, that over Jesus' head
This scroll shall be displayed till he is dead.
Show it, Longinus. Read it if you choose.

VOICES.

"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."
We'll make him King, we'll set him up in state,
At Golgotha. Come; drag him through the gate.
Give him his cross. Come, soldiers.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Israel, wait.

Wait. I must speak. Lord Pilate.

VOICES.

Stand aside. . . .

Are we to miss his being crucified?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Wait. Only wait. One word.

MADMAN.

Lord Pilate. Lord.

SENTRY.

Stand back.

MADMAN.

I'll speak.

SENTRY.

I'll tame you with the sword.

MADMAN.

Lord Pilate, Jesus is an upright man,
I heard his teaching since it first began.

You are mistaken, lord, you are misled.
Spare him, great King.

SENTRY.

Get down.

MADMAN.

Kill me instead.
He never said this thing. (*He is beaten aside.*)

LONGINUS.

The company,
Attention. Front. Take up the prisoner. By
The left, quick wheel. Down to the courtyard,
wheel.

[*The* TROOPS *go out by the doors, into the barracks, so as to reach the main gate from within. The* PRISONER *is not shown, but only suggested.*]

A VOICE.

He cannot lift his cross, I saw him reel.

A VOICE.

We'll find a man to bring it. Hurry, friends.
Three to be nailed.

A Voice.

The thieves will make good ends
They always do. This fellow will die soon.

A Voice.

The troops will spear them all before full moon.
Come; watch them march them out. Get mud to fling.

[*They hurry down the staircase O.P. side.*]

Chief Citizen.

[*To Pilate.*] Lord Pilate, do not write "Jesus the King,"
But that "He called himself 'Jesus the King.'"

Pilate.

Empty this water here. [Servant *does.*]
Remove this board.
Take in the bench.

Chief Citizen.

I have to ask my lord,
That you will change the wording of your scroll,
My lord, it cuts my people to the soul.

PILATE.

Tell Caius Scirrus that I want him. [*Exit* SERVANT.]
So. [*To* CHIEF CITIZEN.]
What I have written, I have written. Go. [*Exit* CHIEF CITIZEN. PILATE *watches him.*

A yell below as the TROOPS *march out from the main gate.* LONGINUS' *voice is heard shouting.*]

LONGINUS.

Right wheel. Quick march. Close up. Keep your files close.

[*A march is played, oboe and trumpet.* PILATE *goes in, the* TROOPS *salute, the bronze doors are closed, but a* SENTRY *stands outside them. The* MADMAN *remains.*]

MADMAN.

They cut my face, there's blood upon my brow.
So, let it run, I am an old man now,
An old, blind beggar picking filth for bread.
Once I wore silk, drank wine,
Spent gold on women, feasted, all was mine;
But this uneasy current in my head
Burst, one full moon, and cleansed me, then I saw

GOOD FRIDAY

Truth like a perfect crystal, life its flaw,
I told the world, but I was mad, they said.

I had a valley farm above a brook,
My sheep bells there were sweet,
And in the summer heat
My mill wheels turned, yet all these things they took;
Ah, and I gave them, all things I forsook
But that green blade of wheat,
My own soul's courage, that they did not take.
I will go on, although my old heart ache.
Not long, not long.
Soon I shall pass behind
This changing veil to that which does not change,
My tired feet will range
In some green valley of eternal mind
Where Truth is daily like the water's song

[*Enter the* CHIEF CITIZEN]

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Where is Lord Pilate?

MADMAN.

Gone within.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

You heard
The way he spoke to me?

MADMAN.

No, not a word.
The dogs so bayed for blood, I could not hear.
Ask the tall sentry yonder with the spear.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

I wish to see Lord Pilate.

SENTRY.

Stand aside.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Send word to him; I cannot be denied.
I have to see him; it concerns the State
Urgently, too, I tell you.

SENTRY.

It can wait.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

It may mean bloodshed.

SENTRY.

Bloodshed is my trade.
A sentry's orders have to be obeyed
The same as God's that you were talking of.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

I tell you, I must see him.

SENTRY.

That's enough.
You cannot now.

MADMAN.

The soldier's words are true.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Could you send word?

SENTRY.

Sir, I have answered you.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Those words that Pilate wrote, the Hebrew screed,
May cause a riot.

MADMAN.

Yes?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

And death.

SENTRY.

Indeed.

You got the poor man's life, what would you more?

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Means to see Pilate.

SENTRY.

As I said before,
You cannot. Stand away. A man like you
Ought to know better than to lead a crew
To yell for a man's blood. God stop my breath,
What does a man like you with blood and death?
Go to.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

You will not send?

SENTRY.

I will not send.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

[*Going.*] You shall regret this.

SENTRY.

Right. Good-bye, my friend.

CHIEF CITIZEN.

Means will be found.

[*Exit.*]

SENTRY.

These priests, these preaching folk.

[*Pause. Sings.*]

"Upon a summer morning, I bade my love good-bye,
In the old green glen so far away,
To go to be a soldier on biscuits made of rye."

It is darker than it was.

MADMAN.

It is falling dark.

SENTRY.

It feels like earthquake weather. Listen.

MADMAN.

Hark.

SENTRY.

It sounded like a shock inside the walls.

MADMAN.

God celebrates the madman's funeral.

SENTRY.

The shouts came from the Temple.

MADMAN.

Yes, they sing
Glory to God there, having killed their King.

SENTRY.

You knew that man they are hanging?

MADMAN.

Yes. Did you?

SENTRY.

Not till I saw him scourged. Was he a Jew?

MADMAN.

No. Wisdom comes from God, and he was wise.
I have touched wisdom since they took my eyes.

SENTRY.

So you were blinded. Why?

MADMAN.

Thinking aloud,
One Passover.

SENTRY.

How so?

MADMAN.

I told the crowd
That only a bloody God would care for blood.
The crowd kill kids and smear the lintel wood,
To honour God, who lives in the pure stars.

SENTRY.

You must have suffered; they are angry scars.

MADMAN.

There is no scar inside.

SENTRY.

That may be so ;
Still, it was mad; men do not wish to know
The truth about their customs, nor aught else.

[*Cries off.*]

MADMAN.

They have nailed the teacher Jesus by those yells.

SENTRY.

It is darker. There'll be earthquake before night.
What sort of man was he?

MADMAN.

He knew the right
And followed her, a stony road, to this.

SENTRY.

I find sufficient trouble in what is
Without my seeking what is right or wrong.

MADMAN.

All have to seek her, and the search is long.

SENTRY.

Maybe.

MADMAN.

And hard.

SENTRY.

Maybe. [*Pause.*]

[*Sings.*]

"I mean to be a captain before I do return.
Though the winters they may freeze and the summers
they may burn,
I mean to be a captain and command a hundred
men
And the women who . . . [*A bugle call off.*]'
There is recall.

[*The doors are open and the* SENTRY *goes.*]

MADMAN.

The wild duck, stringing through the sky,
Are south away.
Their green necks glitter as they fly,
The lake is gray.
So still, so lone, the fowler never heeds.
The wind goes rustle, rustle, through the reeds.

* * * * * *

There they find peace to have their own wild souls.
In that still lake,
Only the moonrise or the wind controls
The way they take,
Through the gray reeds, the cocking moor-hen's lair,
Rippling the pool, or over leagues of air.

* * * * * *

Not thus, not thus are the wild souls of men.
No peace for those
Who step beyond the blindness of the pen
To where the skies unclose.
For them the spitting mob, the cross, the crown of thorns,
The bull gone mad, the Saviour on his horns.

* * * * * *

Beauty and peace have made,
No peace, no still retreat,
No solace, none.
Only the unafraid
Before life's roaring street
Touch Beauty's feet,
Know Truth, do as God bade,
Become God's son.

[*Pause.*]

GOOD FRIDAY

Darkness, come down, cover a brave man's pain,
Let the bright soul go back to God again.
Cover that tortured flesh, it only serves
To hold that thing which other power nerves.
Darkness, come down, let it be midnight here,
In the dark night the untroubled soul sings clear.

[*It darkens.*]

I have been scourged, blinded and crucified,
My blood burns on the stones of every street
In every town; wherever people meet
I have been hounded down, in anguish died.

[*It darkens.*]

The creaking door of flesh rolls slowly back;
Nerve by red nerve the links of living crack,
Loosing the soul to tread another track.
Beyond the pain, beyond the broken clay,
A glimmering country lies
Where life is being wise,
All of the beauty seen by truthful eyes
Are lilies there, growing beside the way.
Those golden ones will loose the torted hands,
Smooth the scarred brow, gather the breaking soul,
Whose earthly moments drop like falling sands

To leave the spirit whole.
Now darkness is upon the face of the earth.

[*He goes.*]

PILATE [*entering, as the darkness reddens to a glare.*]

PILATE.

This monstrous day is in the pangs of birth.
There was a shock. I wish the troops were back
From Golgotha. The heavens are more black
Than in the great shock in my first year's rule.
Please God these zealot pilgrims will keep cool
Nor think this done by God for any cause.
The lightning jags the heaven in bloody scraws
Like chronicles of judgment. Now it breaks.
Now rain.

PROCULA.

[*Entering.*] O Pilate.

PILATE.

What?

PROCULA.

For all our sakes
Speak. Where is Jesus?

PILATE.

He is crucified.

PROCULA.

Crucified?

PILATE.

Put to death. My wife, I tried
To save him, but such men cannot be saved.
Truth to himself till death was all he craved.
He has his will.

PROCULA.

So what they said is true.
O God, my God. But when I spoke to you
You said that you had warned him.

PILATE.

That is so.
Another charge was brought some hours ago,
That he was claiming to be that great King
Foretold by prophets, who shall free the Jews.
This he persisted in. I could not choose
But end a zealot claiming such a thing.

PROCULA.

He was no zealot.

PILATE.

Yes, on this one point.
Had he recanted, well. But he was firm.
So he was cast.

PROCULA.

The gouts of gore anoint
That temple to the service of the worm.
It is a desecration of our power.
A rude poor man who pitted his pure sense
Against what holds the world its little hour,
Blind force and fraud, priests' mummery and pretence.
Could you not see that this is what he did?

PILATE.

Most clearly, wife. But Roman laws forbid
That I should weigh, like God, the worth of souls.
I act for Rome, and Rome is better rid
Of these rare spirits whom no law controls.

He broke a statute, knowing from the first
Whither his act would lead, he was not blind.

PROCULA.

No, friend, he followed hungry and athirst
The lonely exaltation of his mind.
So Rome, our mother, profits by his death,
You think so?

PILATE.

Ay.

PROCULA.

We draw securer breath,
We Romans, for his gasping on the cross?

PILATE.

Some few will be the calmer for his loss.
Many, perhaps; he made a dangerous claim.
Even had I spared it would have been the same
A year, or two, from now. Forget him, friend.

PROCULA.

I have no part nor parcel in his end.
Rather than have it thought I buy my ease,

My body's safety, honour, dignities,
Life and the rest at such a price of pain
There [*she stabs her arm with her dagger*] is my
blood, to wash away the stain.
There. There once more. It fetched too dear a
price.
O God, receive that soul in paradise.

PILATE.

What have you done?

PROCULA.

No matter; it atones.
His blood will clamour from the city stones.

PILATE.

Go in. No, let me bind it.

PROCULA.

Someone comes.
A councillor, I think. Ask what he wants.

[*Enter* JOSEPH.]

JOSEPH.

Greetings, Lord Pilate.

PILATE.

And to you

JOSEPH.

[*To* PROCULA].

And you.

[*To* PILATE.]

I have a boon to ask.

PROCULA.

What can we do?

JOSEPH.

Lord Pilate, may I speak?

PILATE.

[*To* PROCULA.] Go in. [*She goes in.*]

[*To* JOSEPH.]

Go on.

JOSEPH.

The man called Christ, the follower of John,
Was crucified to-day by your decree.

[PILATE *bows.*]

He was my master, very dear to me.
I will not speak of that. I only crave
Leave to prepare his body for the grave,
And then to bury him. May I have leave?

PILATE.

Yes, you may have him when the guards give leave.
Wait. In a case like this, men may believe
That the dead master is not really dead.
This preaching man, this King, has been the head
Of men who may be good and mean no harm,
Whose tenets, none the less, have caused alarm
First to the priests, and through the priests to me.
I wish this preacher's followers to see
That teaching of the kind is to be curbed.
I mean, established truths may be disturbed,
But not the Jews, nor Rome. You understand?

JOSEPH.

I follow; yes.

PILATE.

A riot might be fanned,
Such things have been, over the martyr's grave.

JOSEPH.

His broken corpse is all his followers crave.

PILATE.

Why, very well then.

JOSEPH.

Will you give your seal?

PILATE.

My seal? What for?

JOSEPH.

That I may show the guard
And have the body.

PILATE.

Gladly; but I feel . . .
Not yet; not until dark.

JOSEPH.

It will be hard
To bury him to-night . . . the feast begins.

PILATE.

I know, but still, when men are crucified . . .

JOSEPH.

There is no hope of that. The man has died.

PILATE.

Died? Dead already?

JOSEPH.

Yes.

PILATE.

'Tis passing soon.

JOSEPH.

God broke that bright soul's body as a boon.
He died at the ninth hour.

PILATE.

Are you sure?

JOSEPH.

I saw him, lord.

PILATE.

I thought he would endure
Longer than that; he had a constant mind.

JOSEPH.

The great soul burns the body to a rind.

PILATE.

But dead, already; strange. [*Calling.*]
You in the court,
Send me Longinus here with his report.

A VOICE.

I will, my lord.

PILATE.

This teacher was your friend?

JOSEPH.

Was, is, and will be, till the great world end:
Which God grant may be soon.

PILATE.

I disagree
With teachers of new truth. For men like me

There is but one religion, which is Rome.
No easy one to practise, far from home.
You come from Ramah?

JOSEPH.

Yes.

PILATE.

What chance is there
Of olives being good?

JOSEPH.

They should be fair.

PILATE.

You will not use Italian presses? No?

JOSEPH.

Man likes his own, my lord, however slow;
What the land made, we say, it ought to use.

PILATE.

Your presses waste; oil is too good to lose.
But I shall not persuade.

SERVANT.

Longinus, lord.

PILATE.

Make your report, centurion. Where's your sword ;
What makes you come thus jangled? Are you ill?

LONGINUS.

There was a shock of earthquake up the hill.
I have been shaken. I had meant to come
Before ; but I was whirled . . . was stricken dumb.
I left my sword within. . . . .

PILATE.

Leave it. Attend.
Is the man, Jesus, dead? This is his friend
Who wants to bury him ; he says he is.

LONGINUS.

Jesus is out of all his miseries.
Yes, he is dead, my lord.

PILATE.

Already?

LONGINUS.

Yes.

The men who suffer most endure the less.
He died without our help.

JOSEPH.

Then may I have
His body, lord, to lay it in the grave?

PILATE.

A sentry's there?

LONGINUS.

Yes, lord.

PILATE.

Have you a scroll?
[*Takes paper.*] Right. Now some wax.
[*Writes*] "Give into his control
The body of the teacher; see it laid
Inside the tomb and see the doorway made
Secure with stones and sealed, then bring me word."
This privilege of burial is conferred

On the conditions I have named to you.
See you observe them strictly.

JOSEPH.

I will do
All that himself would ask to show my sense
Of this last kindness. I shall go from hence
Soon, perhaps far; I give you thanks, my lord.
Now the last joy the niggard fates afford;
One little service more, and then an end
Of that divineness touched at through our friend.

[*Exit.*]

PILATE.

See that the tomb is sealed by dark to-night.
Where were you hurt, Longinus? You are white.
What happened at the cross?

LONGINUS.

We nailed him there
Aloft between the thieves, in the bright air.
The rabble and the readers mocked with oaths,
The hangman's squad were dicing for his clothes.

GOOD FRIDAY

The two thieves jeered at him. Then it grew dark.
Till the noon sun was dwindled to a spark,
And one by one the mocking mouths fell still.
We were alone on the accursed hill
And we were still, not even the dice clicked,
Only the heavy blood-gouts dropped and ticked
On to the stone; the hill is all bald stone.
And now and then the hangers gave a groan.
Up in the dark, three shapes with arms outspread.
The blood-drops spat to show how slow they bled.
They rose up black against the ghastly sky.
God, lord, it is a slow way to make die
A man, a strong man, who can beget men.
Then there would come another groan, and then
One of those thieves (tough cameleers those two)
Would curse the teacher from lips bitten through,
And the other bid him let the teacher be.
I have stood much, but this thing daunted me:
The dark, the livid light, and long, long groans
One on another, coming from their bones.
And it got darker and a glare began
Like the sky burning up above the man.
The hangman's squad stood easy on their spears
And the air moaned, and women were in tears,

While still between his groans the robber cursed.
The sky was grim : it seemed about to burst.
Hours had passed : they seemed like awful days.
Then . . . what was that ?

PILATE.

What ? Where ?

LONGINUS.

A kind of blaze,
Fire descending.

PILATE.

No.

LONGINUS.

I saw it.

PILATE.

Yes ?
What was it that you saw ?

LONGINUS.

A fiery tress
Making red letters all across the heaven.
Lord Pilate, pray to God we be forgiven.

GOOD FRIDAY

PILATE.

"The sky was grim," you said, there at the cross.
What happened next?

LONGINUS.

The towers bent like moss
Under the fiery figures from the sky.
Horses were in the air, there came a cry.
Jesus was calling God: it struck us dumb.
One said "He is calling God. Wait. Will God come?
Wait." And we listened in the glare. O Sir,
He was God's son, that man, that minister,
For as he called, fire tore the sky in two,
The sick earth shook and tossed the cross askew,
The earthquake ran like thunder, the earth's bones
Broke, the graves opened, there were falling stones.

PILATE.

I felt the shock even here. So!

LONGINUS.

Jesus cried
Once more and drooped, I saw that he had died.

Lord, in the earthquake God had come for him.
The thought of't shakes me sick, my eyes are dim.

PILATE.

Tell Scirrus to relieve you.

LONGINUS.

Lord . . .

PILATE.

Dismiss.

Lie down and try to sleep; forget all this,
Tell Seirrus I command it. Rest to-night.
Go in, Longinus, go.

LONGINUS.

Thank you, Lord Pilate.

[*Exit* LONGINUS.]

PILATE.

[*Alone.*] No man can stand an earthquake. Men can bear
Tumults of water and of fire and air,
But not of earth, man's grave and standing ground;
When that begins to heave the will goes round.

Longinus, too. [*Noise below.*] Listen:
Does Herod come?
I heard his fifes.
[*The doors open.* SERVANTS *enter.*]

SERVANT.

Lord Herod is at hand;
Will it please your Lordship robe?

PILATE.

Sprinkle fresh sand,
For blood was shed to-day, here, under foot.
[*He robes.*]
Well, that; the other clasp. [*Music off.*]

A VOICE.

Cohort. Salute.

PILATE.

Leave torches at the door. Dismiss. [SERVANTS *go.*]
He comes
Welcomed by everyone; the city hums
With joy when Herod passes. Ah, not thus
Do I go through the town. They welcome us
With looks of hate, with mutterings, curses, stones.

[*Enter* PROCULA.]

Come, stand with me. Welcome, Lord Herod, here.
Welcome must make amends for barrack cheer.
[*The* NUBIANS *hold torches at the door.* HEROD *enters*
Come in, good welcome, Herod.

PROCULA.

Welcome, sir.

HEROD.

To Rome, to Pilate, and to Beauty, greeting;
Give me your hands. What joy is in this meeting.
Pilate, again. You, you have hurt your hand?

PILATE.

It is nothing, sir.

HEROD.

Beauty has touched this hand,
A wound has followed.

PROCULA.

What you please to call
Beauty, my lord, did nothing of the kind.
An earthen vessel tilted with a wall.

HEROD.

May it soon mend. Now let me speak my mind.
Pilate, since you have ruled here, there have been
Moments of . . . discord, shall we say? between
Your government and mine. I am afraid
That I, the native here, have seldom made
Efforts for friendship with you.

PILATE.

Come.

HEROD.

I should
Have done more than I have, done all I could,
Healed the raw wound between the land and Rome,
Helped you to make this hellish town a home,
Not left it, as I fear it has been, hell
To you and yours cooped in a citadel
Above rebellion brewing. For the past
I offer deep regret, grief that will last,
And shame; your generous mind leaves me ashamed.

PILATE.

Really, my lord.

PROCULA.

These things must not be named.

PILATE.

It is generous of you to speak like this,
But, Herod, hark.

PROCULA.

If things have been amiss,
The fault was ours.

HEROD.

No, the fault was mine.
Your generous act this morning was a sign
Of scrupulous justice done to me by you
Unrecognized, unthanked. I thank you now.
Give me your hand . . . so . . . thus.

PILATE.

Herod, I bow
To what you say. To think that I have done
Something (I know not what) that has begun
A kindlier bond between us, touches home.

I have long grieved lest I have injured Rome
By failing towards yourself, where other men
Might have been wiser. . . . That is over, then?
Our differences henceforth may be discussed
In friendly talk together.

HEROD.

So I trust.

PILATE.

Give me your hand; I have long hoped for this.
I need your help, and you, perhaps, need mine.
The tribes are restless on the border-line,
The whole land seethes: the news from Rome is bad.
But this atones.

PROCULA.

O, fully.

HEROD.

I am glad.

PILATE.

Let us go in.

HEROD.

You lead.

PROCULA.

A moment; one. . . .
You named a generous act that he had done . . . ?

HEROD.

This morning, yes ; you sent that man to me
Because his crime was laid in Galilee.
A little thing, but still it touched me close ;
It made me think how our disputes arose
When thieves out of your province brought to me
Were punished with a fine, perhaps set free,
Not sent to you to judge, as you sent him.
In future you will find me more a friend.
Or so I hope.

PILATE.

Thanks. May the gods so send
That this may lead to happier days for us.

VOICES OF THE CROWD

[*who are now flocking in, among them the* MADMAN.]

Herod the good, Herod the glorious.
Long life to Herod.

PILATE.

Come, the crowd begin . . .

VOICES.

Herod for ever.

PILATE.

Let us go within. . . .

HEROD.

Yes. By the by, what happened to the man?
I sent him back to you; a rumour ran
That he was crucified.

PILATE.

He was.

HEROD.

The priests
Rage upon points of doctrine at the feasts.

VOICES.

God bless you, Herod; give you length of days,
Herod.

HEROD.

[*To the* CROWD.] Go home. To God alone give
praise.
This is Deliverance Night; go home, for soon
Over the dusty hill will come the moon,
And you must feast, with prayer to the Adored.
[*To* PILATE.] He well deserved his death.

VOICES.

God bless you, Lord.

PILATE.

I'll lead the way. . . .

VOICES.

Herod

HEROD.

[*To* PROCULA.] Lady, your hand.

PROCULA

There is a just man's blood upon the sand.
Mind how you tread.

[*They go in. The bronze doors are closed. The crowd remains for an instant watching the doors.*]

A VOICE.

Herod the Fox makes friends with Pilate. Why?

A VOICE.

He needs a Roman loan.

A VOICE.

Look at the sky,
The Paschal moon has risen.

A VOICE

God is great.
Why did I linger here? I shall be late. [*Going.*]

A VOICE.

Good-night and blessing.

A Voice.

[*Going.*] Pilate's colour changed
When we cheered Herod.

A Voice.

They have been estranged
A long while now; but now they will be friends.
[*Going.*]

A Voice.

What joy it is when Preparation ends.
Now to our Feast. Do you go down the stair?

A Voice.

Yes, past the pools; will you come with me there?

A Voice.

I love to walk by moonlight; let us go. [*They go.*]

A Voice.

[*Singing.*] Friends, out of Egypt, long ago,
Our wandering fathers came,
Treading the paths that God did show
By pointing cloud and flame.

GOOD FRIDAY

By land and sea His darkness and His light
Led us into His peace. . . . [*The voice dies away.*]

A VOICE.

[*Off.*] Good-night.

A VOICE.

Good-night.

[*Only the* MADMAN *remains. He takes lilies from a box and begins to tie them in bunches.*]

MADMAN.

Only a penny, a penny,
Lilies brighter than any,
Lilies whiter than snow. [*He feels that he is alone.*]
Beautiful lilies grow
Wherever the truth so sweet
Has trodden with bloody feet,
Has stood with a bloody brow.
Friend, it is over now,
The passion, the sweat, the pains,
Only the truth remains. [*He lays lilies down.*]

* * * * * *

GOOD FRIDAY

I cannot see what others see ;
Wisdom alone is kind to me,
Wisdom that comes from Agony.

* * * * * *

Wisdom that lives in the pure skies,
The untouched star, the spirit's eyes :
O Beauty, touch me, make me wise.

CURTAIN

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